



**THE TRUSTEES OF RESERVATIONS
ARCHIVES & RESEARCH CENTER**

Guide to

Muriel S. Kirk Collection Regarding Mission House

MH.MS.Coll.6

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Extent: 3 folders
Linear feet: < 0.25

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

PROVENANCE

Discovered by Muriel S. Kirk in the stewardship files acquired through the gift of Mission House in 1948.

OWNERSHIP & LITERARY RIGHTS

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CITE AS

The Muriel S. Kirk Collection Regarding Mission House. The Trustees of Reservations, Archives & Research Center.

RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS

This collection is open for research.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Mabel Choate was born on December 26, 1870 in New York City to Joseph Hodges Choate (1832-1917) and Caroline Dutcher Sterling Choate (1837-1929). After her mother's death, Mabel Choate inherited Naumkeag, the Choate Family's summer estate in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Mabel Choate would leave this estate to The Trustees in her will.

In 1926, Mabel Choate met landscape architect Fletcher Steele (1885-1971) at a Lenox Garden Club meeting and hired him to create a sitting area at Naumkeag close to the house. Steele designed the Afternoon Garden, thus beginning a 30-year collaboration with Mabel Choate on the gardens at Naumkeag.

A year later, Mabel Choate continued her collaboration with Steele on another project, Mission House, also in Stockbridge. In 1927, Mabel Choate purchased the historic Mission House, which was

in disrepair on Eden Hill (also known as Prospect Hill). It had been built in 1742/1743 for Rev. John Sergeant (1710-1749), a Yale minister who had established a mission for the Mohican Indians at Stockbridge by 1739. When Sergeant died in 1749, he was replaced by another Yale minister, theologian Rev. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), who played a major role in the Great Awakening.

Sergeant's widow, Abigail Williams Sergeant (1721-1791), married Joseph Dwight (1703-1765) and moved to Great Barrington. After Dwight's death, she moved back into the Mission House with one of her sons, Dr. Erastus Sergeant (1742-1814), and his wife, Elizabeth Partridge Sergeant (1744-1815). Sergeant served as the village doctor, and the Mission House was expanded over time to accommodate their family of twelve children.

One of the Dwights' daughters, Pamela Dwight (1753-1807), married attorney Theodore Sedgwick (1746-1813), who successfully argued Mum Bett's case for her freedom from slavery from Colonel John Ashley (1709-1802) (whose house, the Colonel John Ashley House, is now a property of The Trustees of Reservations) under the new 1780 Massachusetts state constitution. Mum Bett, who, upon her freedom, took the name Elizabeth Freeman, worked as a paid employee for the Sedgwicks until her death in 1829 and is buried in the Sedgwick family plot in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

The Mohican Indians had supported the colonists during the American Revolution, many of them dying while serving in the Continental Army. In the mid-1780s, they moved to upstate New York, and the mission church was continued there by Rev. John Sergeant, Jr. In 1818, they moved to Indiana, and then in 1822, to Wisconsin, where the Munsee people joined them. In the 1930s, the people became known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians.

The Mission House had many owners after the Mohicans left Stockbridge. The final owner was Mary Mayer, who approached Mabel Choate in the early 1920s about saving the house. Clearing the title took a number of years, and Mabel Choate finally took possession in 1927.

The year before, Mabel Choate had purchased the Stockbridge Casino Association building (built in 1888 by McKim, Mead & White, and the same firm that had designed Naumkeag) at the corner of Main and Sergeant Streets, when the social and recreational club closed down. Mabel Choate donated the Casino building (along with renovation funds) to the newly formed Three Arts Society, which later became the Berkshire Theatre Festival. The organization moved the building to a lot further down Main Street to the east. Mabel Choate moved the Mission House from Eden Hill to the former Casino lot.

Once the house was settled in its new location on Main Street, landscape architect Fletcher Steele designed colonial gardens and buildings around the house. He also helped Mabel Choate with the restoration of the house itself. Mabel Choate collected antique furnishings from the period of John Sergeant's life to display in the house. She created the Mission House Association, Inc. to run the house as a museum, and in 1928, she transferred ownership of the house from herself to the association. The house and grounds opened to the public in 1930, and Mabel Choate dedicated the

museum to her parents, with a plaque stating that “the character and fortitude of the early settlers lived again in them.” One of Rev. John Sergeant’s descendants, Mary Hopkins Goodrich (1814-1895), had founded the Laurel Hill Association in Stockbridge in 1853, the oldest village beautification society in the United States, in which Mabel Choate’s parents had been active members.

In 1929, Mabel Choate hired Ruth Louise Gaines (1877-1952), a librarian at the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, in New York City, to help her find, negotiate for, and purchase objects from descendants of the Stockbridge Mohicans to display in an Indian Museum behind the house, which she opened in 1937. Several of the objects were later returned by The Trustees of Reservations to the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, including a two-volume Bible and a pewter communion set.

After eighteen years of running the museum independently, the Stockbridge Mission House Association, Inc. donated the museum to The Trustees of Reservations in October 1948, and Mabel Choate gave a \$100,000 endowment.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

The Muriel S. Kirk Collection Regarding Mission House contains three series: Sergeant Family, Journal of John Sergeant, Jr., and Postcards.

Series I, Sergeant Family, contains school standing reports of Henry C. Sergeant, magazine clippings about “The Sergeant Family” painting located in the National Gallery in Washington D.C., and photographs of the family. These photographs include two portraits, one image of Henry Clark Sergeant and his wife in “the first ‘horseless carriage’ in New Jersey,” and a family portrait.

Series II, Journal of John Sergeant, Jr., includes a photostat copy of the journal of John Sergeant, Jr. The journal covers Sergeant’s missionary journey to the Stockbridge Indians from the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge.

Series I, Postcards, contains two postcards of Mission House. One is an exterior view and the other an interior view.

Box	Folder	Contents	Date
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Series I. Sergeant Family

< 0.25 (1 folder)

Dates: 1847-1976, n.d.

Series I, handwritten report, photographs, and magazine clippings.

Sergeant Family

1	1	Reports on standing of Henry C. Sergeant	1847
1	1	Magazine clippings	1976, n.d.
1	1	Photographs	n.d.

Series II. Journal of John Sergeant, Jr.

< 0.25 (1 folder)

Dates: 1804-1824

Series II, Photostat copy of handwritten journal.

Journal of John Sergeant Jr.

1	2	Photostat copy of journal of John Sergeant, Jr.	
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Series III. Postcards

< 0.25 (1 folder)

Dates: 1912, n.d.

Series III, postcards.

Postcards

1	3	Postcards	1912, n.d.
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